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ART. XI. — CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE.

1. — 1. *Renaissance in Italy: The Age of the Despots*. By JOHN ADDINGTON SYMONDS. London: Smith, Elder, & Co. 1875. 8vo. pp. xvi, 574.
2. *The Revival of Learning*. London. 1877. pp. xv, 546.
3. *The Fine Arts*. London. 1877. pp. xiv, 539.

It is Mr. Symonds's purpose in the three handsome volumes before us (to be completed by one on Italian Literature) to give a detailed account of that wonderful intellectual movement in the fifteenth century which, for want of a better term we name Renaissance, — the new birth of humanity brought about by the revival of classical letters, or rather of the classical spirit. In a narrow sense the Renaissance is the period during which the Italians became conscious of their Latin ancestry and sought to revive the literature and arts of ancient Rome. In a broader sense the Renaissance is the transition period from the Middle Ages to the modern world, and it is in this sense that Mr. Symonds understands it and attempts to describe it.

A mere history of the effects of a certain spirit would be unsatisfactory without some account of the growth of that spirit and the external causes that modified it and caused it to assume peculiar and phenomenal shapes. This is the case with the history of the Renaissance. The new spirit of classical learning, with the momentous changes it wrought in the moral constitution of mankind, modified powerfully Italian society of the fifteenth century, but it was itself influenced by it, and the rapid assimilation of the new spirit could not have taken place without a certain pre-existing state of society. The author devotes the first volume of his work to giving a picture of this society in a survey of the political and social condition of Italy during the fifteenth century. It may be doubted whether any period of modern history possesses so many individual characters who have exercised on posterity such powerful fascination as Lorenzo de' Medici, the Borgias, Savonarola, and Michael Angelo, — names which represent the extremes of the tendencies of their age. It was the age of immense contrasts, of the grossest immorality and most fervent piety, of outward Christianity and inward paganism, of wild bloodthirstiness and gentle manners, — the age that produced a Vittoria Colonna and a Lucrezia Borgia. It is, in short, an age that

must always remain a psychological problem and baffle the fascinated student. Mr. Symonds gives a vivid picture of this immoral, tyrant-ridden Italy of the fifteenth century, and indicates the conditions which were favorable to the new spirit which manifested itself, first, in what is known as the Revival of Learning. The numerous courts of wealthy and able despots were so many centres of patronage where the tyrant assumed the mask of Mæcenas and lavished the state treasures on manuscripts of Cicero and Homer. It is difficult for us now to comprehend the boundless enthusiasm for classical learning which possessed the whole nation. We must, however, bear in mind that it had all the charm of freshness. In Petrarch's day Greek was practically unknown in Italy, and there is something touching in the middle-aged Boccaccio endeavoring to catch a glimpse of Homer's grandeur, and becoming the first Greek scholar in Italy. This charm of freshness attached to Latin also, for although it was the language of the Church and State, it had departed immeasurably from the models of classic times, and the language of Cicero was as new as the language of Homer.

In his second volume the author describes the Revival of Learning from Petrarch and Boccaccio to its final stage in Bembo and the purists. We witness the eager search after manuscripts, the careful collation of texts, the founding of the great libraries at Florence and Rome, the rise of learned academies, and the final pedantry which brought discredit upon the whole movement and degenerated into affectation. One of the most interesting characters of this period is the wandering professor, a perambulating library, who expounded the new-found classics to enthusiastic crowds, and when he had finished the minute exposition of the few authors to whom he had devoted his life moved on to another city where his lectures were fresh. They were for the most part arrogant, irascible men, puffed up with the consciousness that they were the only receptacles of learning, and their quarrels form one of the most curious chapters in the history of the period.

The large mass of biographical details in this volume wearies the reader; it is, however, relieved by many interesting disquisitions on libraries, the introduction and early history of printing, and the Latin literature of the Renaissance. It is not until we can form an idea of the whole movement and its results on the individual and society that we can appreciate the efforts of a Poggio Bracciolini in collecting manuscripts or the munificence of a Cosimo de' Medici in founding public libraries.

The new spirit was not manifested alone in literature, it soon showed itself in art; and it is to this side of the movement that the third volume of Mr. Symonds's work is devoted. His purpose, as he says in his Pref-

ace, is not to retrace the history of the Italian arts, but rather to define their relation to the main movement of Renaissance culture. With this object in view he tries to explain the dependence of the arts on mediæval Christianity at their commencement, their gradual emancipation from ecclesiastical control, and their final attainment of freedom at the moment when the classical revival culminated. We cannot but feel that this volume is wanting in the interest of the former ones. We are again oppressed by the mass of details from which no very clear ideas are evolved. The relation of the earlier artists to the Renaissance movement is, it seems to us, insufficiently indicated; and we do not think the author explains the influence of the Renaissance on the religious and secular styles of such artists as Raphael and Titian. The chapters on Michael Angelo and Benvenuto Cellini are more interesting for their personal details than for art criticism, and might have been placed in the first volume as illustrating Italian society. In an Appendix the author gives some excellent translations from Michael Angelo's sonnets, using the new text edited by Guasti.*

The faults we have hinted at above are inseparable from the arrangement of Mr. Symonds's work. The historical and social details are crowded into one volume, the scholars are assigned to the second, and the artists to the third. This method is convenient for reference, but it fails to give a clear picture of the whole movement in its mutual relations. The reader is obliged to make his own combinations, whereas a combined history of the period would have given a clearer idea and avoided much repetition and reference to the other volumes. With this exception to the author's method we can heartily praise the execution of the work. There existed previous to it in English only such partial works as Greswell's *Memoirs of Politianus*, etc. (London, 1805), Shepherd's *Life of Poggio Bracciolini* (London, 1837), and the notices scattered through the works of Roscoe and others. Mr. Symonds has supplied this want in an excellent manner. He has made good use of the material accumulated by his predecessors in this field in other countries, and has added to it his own independent labor and observation. His spirit is candid and catholic, and his literary perception clear and sound. He is in full sympathy with his subject, and his readers cannot fail to catch some of his enthusiasm. In spite of the somewhat

* *Le Rime di Michelangelo Buonarroti*. Firenze, 1863. It may be well to warn our readers against all previous texts. They rest on the edition prepared in 1623 by the poet's grand-nephew, who, himself a poet, took the liberty of altering his uncle's poems to suit the taste of the day. In one sonnet, for instance, he left but one line as the author wrote it. An excellent article on the subject may be found in Wilhelm Lang's *Transalpinische Studien*. Leipzig, 1875. 2 vols. Vol. I. p. 173.

dry nature of parts of his subject he has produced a readable as well as a valuable work, and we shall look forward with interest to the volume on Italian Literature, which we have no doubt will complete the whole in a worthy manner.

2. — *Peru : Incidents of Travel and Exploration in the Land of the Incas.*

By E. GEORGE SQUIER, M. A., F. S. A. New York : Harper and Bros. 1877. pp. 588.

THERE is no country in the New World to which a higher antiquarian and archæological interest attaches than to that portion of the continent of South America which owned the sway of the Incas. The iconoclastic tendencies of the conquering Spaniards, in their efforts to introduce what they erroneously conceived to be a higher civilization, have destroyed so thoroughly these wonderful traces of a powerful and cultured race, that the archæologist often finds himself puzzled to reconstruct, from the remains and *débris*, the palaces and temples of a bygone period. Whatever a ferocious and bigoted superstition spared, the cupidity and avarice of treasure-seekers has since completed. When we remember that many of the most imposing and majestic of these structures were not more than a century old when the Spaniards entered the country, and that the civilization of the Incas generally was of comparatively late date, we cannot but regret that fate should have doomed it to an invasion of European hordes as ruthless and barbarous as were those Huns and Goths who swept away the civilization of Rome. Fascinated by the romance which must ever attach to the traces of a civilization so recent and yet so rapidly becoming wholly effaced, Mr. Squier has devoted himself to a complete and laborious investigation of the ruins of Peru ; indeed, his present work may be considered a text-book on the subject. He has carefully gone over the ground of Rivero and Von Tschudi, corrected many of their errors, and thrown light on much that they left vague and uncertain. In his examination of Lake Titicaca and its neighborhood he has filled up much that even Pentland has failed to notice. It is needless to say that the ancient Spanish chroniclers were extremely unreliable. Dazzled with the splendor and magnificence of a civilization so gorgeous as to surpass all their former experience, their accounts were invariably exaggerated, and in many instances almost fabulous. Had Garcilasso, Cieza de Leon, and others described accurately and truthfully what they saw, they would at least, in some measure, have atoned for the acts of vandalism in which they took part. But the interest of this portion of South America is not confined to the remains of Inca civilization. Mr. Squier first takes us